SŪRAH 60

Al-Mumtaḥanah

(Women Tested)

Prologue

The present *sūrah* provides yet another episode in the cultivation of the Muslim community, its social organization and state building during the Madīnah period. It thus forms a link in the chain that is the divine system, a system laid down for the community chosen to implement it in society. With such a well-defined and distinctive system humanity would be able to strive to achieve its goals, but there would be times when its efforts would fall short of what is required. Nonetheless, humanity would always look up to it, aiming to mirror that ideal form when the first Muslim community put it into practice.

This objective required, as we have stated on more than one occasion, long preparations each involving different stages. The events that happened within or around the Muslim community provided some of the material necessary for such preparations. While the events themselves were determined according to God's knowledge, they also provided the context for their explanation and interpretation, as also for comments and directives.

In the midst of all these events, the process of building the characters of the people who undertook the task of implementing the Islamic system was completed. Thus, in its formative stage, the Muslim community separated itself from the rest of society insofar as it needed

to remain pure, free of any alien aspect. Furthermore, it should also be acknowledged that this distinctive concept of faith, Islam, represented something new, unknown anywhere else in the world, and especially not in Arabia. All this, however, did not mean that Islam isolated itself from events occurring in the larger society. Indeed the Muslims were part of these events, interacting with them as they took place. This process of interaction also meant that they might be repeatedly influenced, and in different ways, by the same event. God, who created those people, knew that they do not all respond in the same way to the first touch, and that they might need more than one such touch for a certain effect to settle in. He also knew that remnants of the past, natural attractions and tendencies, human weaknesses, practical considerations, as well as old habits and traditions might represent obstacles that could hinder the process of cultivation. To overcome such difficulties necessitated repeated reminders. Events took place in succession, as determined by God's will, providing the required admonition and the basis for issuing warnings and directives.

Sharp, alert and blessed with keen insight, the Prophet used such events and occasions wisely, at every turn, to help this process of character cultivation. He was supported in this process by revelations that directed and endorsed what he did to mould that first Muslim community.

The Process of Cultivation

This *sūrah* represents a stage in that long process of cultivation aiming to establish within the conscience of every Muslim a pure world, with faith as the pivot around which it turns. In this world, Muslims congregate around this axis of faith, having only one unseverable bond. They purge their hearts of all ties of nationality, race, country, clan or family, replacing them all with the single bond of belief in God and being members of God's party.

The world Islam wants to build is both divine and human: it is divine in the sense that it derives all its principles and values from God's directives and wisdom, and addresses all its actions to God hoping to earn His pleasure. It is human in the sense that it encompasses all humanity within the broad scope of faith. Hence, in such a world the barriers of

race, country, language, family and all that separates one person from another are removed to leave only the tie of faith. Such is the noble world that is worthy of man, a creature God has honoured, breathing of His spirit into him.

Obstacles hindering the building of such a world were numerous in the Arabian environment, as also in our world today. Attachments to family, clan, race and land accounted for some of these obstacles. Others included personal leanings and desires, such as selfishness, pride, greed, psychological preferences and prejudices, as well as many other elements that work on man's mind. Islam needed to deal with all this in the community that had been chosen to implement the divine system and provide a practical example of it. This *sūrah*, then, is a step in that long process.

Some of the Muslims who migrated to Madīnah, leaving their possessions, homes and families behind for the sake of their faith continued to feel some attachment to those they had left behind in Makkah, specifically, for example, their spouses and offspring. Furthermore, despite all the persecution they had suffered at the hands of the Makkans, some Muslims still wished for a reconciliation that would see an end to fighting against relatives and family members.

On the other hand, God wanted to purge their hearts of all these bonds, so that they dedicated themselves to His faith and the system He wanted implemented. God knew the heavy pressures of natural tendencies and old practices on people. Indeed, the Arabs valued the ties of family, clan and tribe more strongly than any other community. Therefore, the Qur'ān continued to administer its effective treatment through events and comments on those events. Thus, the treatment would be administered on the stage of reality, just at the appropriate moment.

Treasonable Action

Reports mention a particular incident that led to the revelation of the first part of the present *sūrah*. This may be so, with the incident providing the immediate reason for such revelation, but Qur'ānic texts always go much further than particular events.

Ḥāṭib ibn Abū Balta'ah was one of the Muhājirīn who migrated with the Prophet from Makkah to Madīnah and was one of those who took part in the Battle of Badr. He had children and property he had left behind in Makkah. He did not belong to the Quraysh, but was an ally of 'Uthmān. When the Prophet decided to march to Makkah after its people were in breach of the peace treaty he had concluded with them two years earlier, he ordered his Companions to get ready. He prayed to God that the Quraysh would remain unaware of his intentions. He did, however, tell some of his Companions what he was planning to do; Ḥāṭib was among those. Ḥāṭib then wrote a letter to the Quraysh warning them that the Prophet intended to mount an attack against them. He gave it to a woman who concealed it and managed to leave Madīnah without being detected by any of the guards appointed by the Prophet on all exits and entrances. By so doing, Ḥāṭib hoped the Quraysh would consider his action as a favour and so not harm his family. The Prophet was informed by God of Ḥāṭib's action. He therefore sent chasers to retrieve the letter from that woman.

Al-Bukhārī relates on the authority of 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib: "God's Messenger sent me and al-Zubayr ibn al-'Awwām, on horseback, telling us to go as far as a place called Rawḍat Khākh, where we would find a woman unbeliever carrying a letter written by Ḥāṭib ibn Abī Balta'ah to the unbelievers, which we were to retrieve. We caught up with her as she was riding her camel. We asked her to give us the letter, but she denied having any such thing. We sat her camel down and tried to find the letter but we could see none. We said to her: 'We swear by God, the Prophet has not lied. You will either do as we tell you and give us the letter or we will undress you.' She realized that we were serious and that she had no option but to comply. She undid her hair, which was covered and took the letter out. She gave it to us and we went straight back to Madīnah to hand it to the Prophet."

The Prophet called Ḥāṭib in and questioned him about what he had done. Ḥāṭib appealed to the Prophet not to jump to any conclusions. He said: "I am certainly a believer in God and His Messenger. I have not changed at all. It is not that I have any doubts in matters of faith. I only thought of doing the Quraysh a favour by which God would protect my children and family. All your Companions who have families

or property in Makkah have relatives and clans there to whom God provides protection."

The Prophet recognized that Ḥāṭib was telling the truth. He said to those around him: "What he has told you is certainly the truth. Therefore, say nothing but good about him." 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb said to the Prophet: "He has betrayed God, His Messenger and the believers. Allow me to behead this hypocrite." The Prophet said to him: "Was he not one of the people who fought the Battle of Badr? How would you know, 'Umar, that God has not looked at the soldiers of Badr and said to them: I have forgiven you whatever you will do?" Tears sprang to 'Umar's eyes as he said: "God and His Messenger know better."

Al-Bukhārī adds in another version of this story that the present *sūrah* was revealed in connection with this event. In a third version he says that the Prophet sent three men, the other being al-Miqdād, to retrieve the letter.

Lessons Derived

To reflect a little on this event and its consequences does not go beyond our purpose of looking at how the Qur'ān uses events to cultivate the Muslim community and refine its attitudes through both the Prophet and Qur'ānic instructions and commentaries.

The first thing to look at is the deed itself done by Ḥāṭib, an early Muslim who belonged to the elite of the Muhājirīn and one of the few who were informed by the Prophet of the objective behind his intended campaign. The event shows us how the human soul may experience moments of weakness, no matter how strong it may be in its faith. Only God can protect us from such moments.

Then we see the Prophet's great attitude through it all, waiting to establish the facts before coming to any conclusion. He patiently questioned Ḥāṭib about his motives. We see the sympathy for his Companion in his moment of weakness, realizing that he told the truth. Therefore, he stopped his Companions from having a go at him, telling them: "What he has told you is certainly the truth. Therefore, say nothing but good about him." Thus he helped him to rise after he had slipped. He did not allow anyone to taunt him. By contrast, we see

'Umar's seriousness in such a matter as he said to the Prophet: "He has betrayed God, His Messenger and the believers. Allow me to behead this hypocrite." 'Umar looked at the deed itself and his reaction reflects his uncompromising attitude. The Prophet, on the other hand, looked at it from a broader perspective, with his thorough understanding of human nature. His sympathy was that of a caring educator, with profound and comprehensive knowledge, looking at all circumstances.

We also need to reflect a little on Ḥāṭib's own words explaining his momentary weakness, even though his concept of God's will and the factors at play in worldly matters was perfectly sound. He said to the Prophet: "I only thought of doing the Quraysh a favour by which God would protect my children and family..." Thus, he knew that it is God who protects, not the favour he wanted to do the Quraysh. This is confirmed in the remainder of his explanation: "All your Companions who have families or property in Makkah have relatives and clans there to whom God provides protection." We see how he maintained that it is God who protects, not relatives or clans. They are merely the tools by which God's purpose may be done.

Perhaps the Prophet's reaction took this right concept into account. Perhaps he realized that Ḥāṭib was telling the truth. Hence, what he said to his Companions required them only to say good words to Ḥāṭib.

Another point of reflection looks at God's will as this event unfolds. Ḥāṭib was one of the few people who knew from the Prophet the true goal behind this campaign, yet here we see a moment of weakness affect one of these select few. Then, God's will ensured that this moment of weakness had no adverse consequences for the Muslims. It is as if the whole purpose was to unravel this weakness and treat it. None of the Prophet's other Companions who had not been informed of the Prophet's secret objective tried to exploit this moment, pressing their own claims of being more worthy of trust. This reflected the Muslims' attitude towards their leadership, and their own humility, as well as their desire to learn the lesson of what had happened to their brother.

The event itself is related in confirmed and authentic *aḥādīth*. As for its being the direct cause of the revelation of these verses, this is mentioned in one of the versions related by al-Bukhārī. We do not exclude the possibility that this report is accurate. However, the significance of

the Qur'ānic texts goes much further than this individual case. These Qur'ānic verses deal with a psychological situation that could affect anyone. They follow the Qur'ānic method of using a particular event to press home certain instructions and directives.

The Qur'ān deals here with the question of close relations, narrow affiliations, as well as adherence to what is familiar and what one generation inherits from another. It wants to instil new bonds, values and standards into believers as well as a new outlook on the universe, life, man, their role as believers and the purpose for human existence. It was, in effect, bringing together these new plants, the believers, under God's care so that He could teach and enlighten them about their existence and role. It wanted to open their eyes to the hostilities around them and to the schemes of their enemies. God wanted them to feel that they belonged to Him, making up His party, and that He wanted them to bring about something He willed to happen. They were to be marked out as His, known among all communities as His own, both in this life and in the life to come. Let them, then, dedicate themselves to His cause, maintaining no ties other than His.

The *sūrah* in its entirety moves in this direction. Even the legislative verses at the end, which speak about how believing women who migrate to join the Muslim community should be treated, the pledge of loyalty given by women who accept Islam, separating women believers from their husbands who are not Muslim, and relations between male believers and their wives who reject the faith, all lay down regulations in line with that general direction.

The *sūrah* concludes in the same way as it started, ordering the believers not to make God's enemies, whether idolaters or Jews, their intimate friends. This ensures that the separation between believers and unbelievers is complete, and that all ties except that of faith, are abandoned.

Al-Mumtaḥanah
(Women Tested)

سُورَةُ الْمُمْتَحَنَةِ

In the Name of God, the Lord of Grace, the Ever Merciful

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Believers! Do not take My enemies, who are your enemies as well, for your friends, showing them affection when they have rejected the truth you have received, and have driven the Messenger and yourselves out only because you believe in God, your Lord. If you have left your homes to strive in My cause and to seek My pleasure, then do not secretly lean towards them with affection. I well know all that you conceal and all that you reveal. Whoever of you does this has already strayed from the right path. (1)

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَتَّخِذُوا عَدُوِّي وَعَدُوَّكُمْ أَوْلِيَاءَ تُلْقُونَ إِلَيْهِم بِالْمَوَدَّةِ وَقَدْ كَفَرُوا بِمَا جَاءَكُم مِّنَ الْحَقِّ يُخْرِجُونَ الرَّسُولَ وَإِيَّاكُمْ أَن تُؤْمِنُوا بِاللَّهِ رَبِّكُمْ إِن كُنتُمْ خَرَجْتُمْ جِهَادًا فِي سَبِيلِي وَابْتِغَاءَ مَرْضَاتِي تُسِرُّونَ إِلَيْهِم بِالْمَوَدَّةِ وَأَنَا أَعْلَمُ بِمَا أَخْفَيْتُمْ وَمَا أَعْلَنتُمْ ۚ وَمَن يَفْعَلْهُ مِنكُمْ فَقَدْ ضَلَّ سَوَاءَ السَّبِيلِ ﴿١﴾

If they get the better of you, they will remain your enemies and stretch out their hands and tongues to you with evil. They dearly wish to see you unbelievers. (2)

إِن يَثْقَفُوكُمْ يَكُونُوا لَكُمْ أَعْدَاءً وَيَبْسُطُوا إِلَيْكُمْ أَيْدِيَهُمْ وَأَلْسِنَتَهُم بِالسُّوءِ وَوَدُّوا لَوْ تَكْفُرُونَ ﴿٢﴾

Neither your kinsfolk nor your own children will be of any benefit to you. On the Day of Resurrection He will decide between you. God sees all that you do. (3)

لَن تَنفَعَكُمْ أَرْحَامُكُمْ وَلَا أَوْلَادُكُمْ ۚ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ يَفْصِلُ بَيْنَكُمْ ۚ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ ﴿٣﴾

قَدْ كَانَتْ لَكُمْ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ فِي إِبْرَٰهِيمَ
وَالَّذِينَ مَعَهُۥٓ إِذْ قَالُوا۟ لِقَوْمِهِمْ إِنَّا بُرَءَٰٓؤُا۟
مِنكُمْ وَمِمَّا تَعْبُدُونَ مِن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ كَفَرْنَا
بِكُمْ وَبَدَا بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمُ ٱلْعَدَٰوَةُ
وَٱلْبَغْضَآءُ أَبَدًا حَتَّىٰ تُؤْمِنُوا۟ بِٱللَّهِ وَحْدَهُۥٓ
إِلَّا قَوْلَ إِبْرَٰهِيمَ لِأَبِيهِ لَأَسْتَغْفِرَنَّ لَكَ
وَمَآ أَمْلِكُ لَكَ مِنَ ٱللَّهِ مِن شَىْءٍ ۖ رَّبَّنَا عَلَيْكَ
تَوَكَّلْنَا وَإِلَيْكَ أَنَبْنَا وَإِلَيْكَ ٱلْمَصِيرُ ﴿٤﴾

You have a good example in Abraham and those who followed him, when they said to their people: 'We disown you and what you worship instead of God. We reject you. The enmity and hate that have arisen between us and you will last until you believe in God alone.' The only exception was Abraham, when he said to his father, 'I shall pray for forgiveness for you, although it is not in my power to be of any avail to you against God.' 'Our Lord! In You we have placed our trust, and to You do we turn, and with You is the final destination. (4)

رَبَّنَا لَا تَجْعَلْنَا فِتْنَةً لِّلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ وَٱغْفِرْ
لَنَا رَبَّنَآ ۖ إِنَّكَ أَنتَ ٱلْعَزِيزُ ٱلْحَكِيمُ ﴿٥﴾

Our Lord! Do not make of us a test for the unbelievers. Forgive us, Lord. You are the Almighty, the Wise.' (5)

لَقَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فِيهِمْ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ لِّمَن كَانَ
يَرْجُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ وَٱلْيَوْمَ ٱلْءَاخِرَ ۚ وَمَن يَتَوَلَّ فَإِنَّ
ٱللَّهَ هُوَ ٱلْغَنِىُّ ٱلْحَمِيدُ ﴿٦﴾

In them, indeed, you have a good example for everyone who looks forward with hope to God and the Last Day. Anyone who turns away should remember that God is truly self-sufficient, worthy of all praise. (6)

عَسَى ٱللَّهُ أَن يَجْعَلَ بَيْنَكُمْ وَبَيْنَ
ٱلَّذِينَ عَادَيْتُم مِّنْهُم مَّوَدَّةً ۚ وَٱللَّهُ قَدِيرٌ ۚ
وَٱللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ ﴿٧﴾

It may well be that God will bring about affection between you and those who are now your enemies. God is all powerful; God is much forgiving, ever merciful. (7)

لَّا يَنْهَىٰكُمُ ٱللَّهُ عَنِ ٱلَّذِينَ لَمْ يُقَٰتِلُوكُمْ
فِى ٱلدِّينِ وَلَمْ يُخْرِجُوكُم مِّن دِيَٰرِكُمْ أَن
تَبَرُّوهُمْ وَتُقْسِطُوٓا۟ إِلَيْهِمْ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يُحِبُّ
ٱلْمُقْسِطِينَ ﴿٨﴾

God does not forbid you to deal kindly and with full equity with those who do not fight you on account of your faith, nor drive you out of your homes. God loves those who behave equitably. (8)

إِنَّمَا يَنْهَىٰكُمُ ٱللَّهُ عَنِ ٱلَّذِينَ قَٰتَلُوكُمْ فِى ٱلدِّينِ
وَأَخْرَجُوكُم مِّن دِيَٰرِكُمْ وَظَٰهَرُوا۟ عَلَىٰٓ
إِخْرَاجِكُمْ أَن تَوَلَّوْهُمْ ۚ وَمَن يَتَوَلَّهُمْ فَأُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ
هُمُ ٱلظَّٰلِمُونَ ﴿٩﴾

God only forbids you to turn in friendship towards those who fight against you because of your faith, and drive you from your homes, and help others to drive you out. Those of you who turn towards them in friendship are indeed wrongdoers. (9)

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓا۟ إِذَا جَآءَكُمُ
ٱلْمُؤْمِنَٰتُ مُهَٰجِرَٰتٍ فَٱمْتَحِنُوهُنَّ ۖ
ٱللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ بِإِيمَٰنِهِنَّ ۖ فَإِنْ عَلِمْتُمُوهُنَّ
مُؤْمِنَٰتٍ فَلَا تَرْجِعُوهُنَّ إِلَى ٱلْكُفَّارِ ۖ
لَا هُنَّ حِلٌّ لَّهُمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحِلُّونَ لَهُنَّ ۖ
وَءَاتُوهُم مَّآ أَنفَقُوا۟ ۚ وَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ
أَن تَنكِحُوهُنَّ إِذَآ ءَاتَيْتُمُوهُنَّ أُجُورَهُنَّ ۚ
وَلَا تُمْسِكُوا۟ بِعِصَمِ ٱلْكَوَافِرِ وَسْـَٔلُوا۟
مَآ أَنفَقْتُمْ وَلْيَسْـَٔلُوا۟ مَآ أَنفَقُوا۟ ۚ ذَٰلِكُمْ
حُكْمُ ٱللَّهِ يَحْكُمُ بَيْنَكُمْ ۚ وَٱللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ
حَكِيمٌ ﴿١٠﴾

Believers! When believing women come to you as migrants, test them. God knows best their faith. If you ascertain that they are believers, do not send them back to the unbelievers. They are no longer lawful [as wives] for the unbelievers, and these are no longer lawful to them. None the less, hand back to the unbelievers the dowries they have paid them. It is no offence for you to marry them after giving them their dowries. Do not hold on to marriage ties with unbelieving women. Ask for repayment of the dowries you have paid, just as they have the right to ask for repayment of their dowries. Such is God's judgement. He judges between you in equity. God is all-knowing, wise. (10)

وَإِن فَاتَكُمْ شَيْءٌ مِّنْ أَزْوَاجِكُمْ إِلَى الْكُفَّارِ
فَعَاقَبْتُمْ فَآتُوا الَّذِينَ ذَهَبَتْ أَزْوَاجُهُم
مِّثْلَ مَا أَنفَقُوا ۚ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ الَّذِي أَنتُم بِهِ
مُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿١١﴾

Should any of your wives go over to the unbelievers and you subsequently acquire gains from them, then pay those whose wives have gone away the equivalent of whatever dowry they had paid. Fear God, in whom you believe. (11)

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ إِذَا جَاءَكَ الْمُؤْمِنَاتُ
يُبَايِعْنَكَ عَلَىٰ أَن لَّا يُشْرِكْنَ بِاللَّهِ
شَيْئًا وَلَا يَسْرِقْنَ وَلَا يَزْنِينَ وَلَا يَقْتُلْنَ
أَوْلَادَهُنَّ وَلَا يَأْتِينَ بِبُهْتَانٍ يَفْتَرِينَهُ
بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِنَّ وَأَرْجُلِهِنَّ وَلَا يَعْصِينَكَ
فِي مَعْرُوفٍ فَبَايِعْهُنَّ وَاسْتَغْفِرْ لَهُنَّ
اللَّهَ ۖ إِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ ﴿١٢﴾

Prophet! When believing women come and pledge to you that they will not associate any partner with God, nor steal, nor commit adultery, nor kill their children, nor lie about who fathered their children, nor disobey you in anything reasonable, then accept their pledge of allegiance and pray to God to forgive them. God is most forgiving, ever merciful. (12)

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَتَوَلَّوْا قَوْمًا
غَضِبَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ قَدْ يَئِسُوا مِنَ
الْآخِرَةِ كَمَا يَئِسَ الْكُفَّارُ مِنْ
أَصْحَابِ الْقُبُورِ ﴿١٣﴾

Believers! Do not take as friends any people with whom God is angry. They despair of the life to come just as the unbelievers despair of those buried in their graves. (13)

What Friends?

> *Believers! Do not take My enemies, who are your enemies as well, for your friends, showing them affection when they have rejected the truth you have received, and have driven the Messenger and yourselves out only because you believe in God, your Lord. If you have left your homes to strive in My cause and to seek My pleasure, then do not secretly lean towards them with affection. I well know all that you conceal and all that you reveal. Whoever of you does this has already strayed from the right path. If they get the better of you, they will remain your enemies and stretch out their hands and tongues to you with evil. They dearly wish to see you unbelievers.* (Verses 1–2)

The *sūrah* begins with this friendly and inspiring address, calling on '*believers*'. It is an address by their Lord in whom they believe, who calls on them in the name of faith that establishes their bond with Him, to carefully consider their position. He also warns them against their enemies' schemes and reminds them of the task they have been assigned. In a kindly and friendly way, God makes their enemies His enemies: "*Believers! Do not take My enemies, who are your enemies as well, for your friends, showing them affection.*" (Verse 1) Thus, He makes the believers feel that they belong to Him. Whoever is hostile to them is actually hostile to Him. They are the people who bear His insignia on earth and the ones He loves. Therefore, it is inconceivable that they should show affection to those who are His and their enemies.

God reminds them of the crimes, aggression and injustice committed by those people against them, their faith and His Messenger: "*They have rejected the truth you have received, and have driven the Messenger and yourselves out only because you believe in God, your Lord.*" (Verse 1) Having committed all such injustices, what basis could there be for friendship and affection? They rejected the truth and drove the Prophet and his followers out of their homes for no other reason than that they believed in God. He reminds the believers of all this, stating in effect that it was for their faith that the unbelievers fought them, not for any other reason. The real issue of contention, i.e. faith, is brought to the fore. They were driven out of their homes for no reason other than faith.

Having thus stated the true issue of conflict, the *sūrah* reminds the believers that there is no room for intimacy between them and the unbelievers, if they have truly left their homes for God's sake, and in quest of His pleasure: "*If you have left your homes to strive in My cause and to seek My pleasure.*" (Verse 1) It is not possible for someone to migrate seeking God's pleasure and His cause to combine this with friendship with those who drove him out because of it. Such people are the enemies of God and His Messenger.

The *sūrah* then adds an implicit warning against what they conceal in their hearts of friendly feelings towards their enemies, God's enemies. He is fully aware of what hearts may secretly harbour and what they leave in the open: "*Do not secretly lean towards them with affection. I well know all that you conceal and all that you reveal.*" (Verse 1) This is followed by a fearsome warning that strikes fear in believers' hearts: "*Whoever of you does this has already strayed from the right path.*" (Verse 1) A believer fears nothing worse than going astray after he has known and followed guidance.

The threat and the warning come right in the middle of an explanation of the unbelievers' true character and their evil intentions. Further explanation follows: "*If they get the better of you, they will remain your enemies and stretch out their hands and tongues to you with evil. They dearly wish to see you unbelievers.*" (Verse 2) Whenever they have the chance to take advantage of the Muslims, they will act as open enemies, causing them whatever harm they can, verbal and physical, using every means available.

What is even worse is that "*they dearly wish to see you unbelievers.*" (Verse 2) To a believer, this is worse than any verbal or physical harm that can be done to him. To wish him to lose his most valuable treasure of faith and revert to disbelief is to be his worst enemy. A person who has tasted the sweetness of faith after being an unbeliever, who has seen its light after the darkness of unbelief, and who has experienced the reassurance and happiness generated by holding the concepts and feelings of a believer will hate to revert to disbelief, just as much as he would hate being thrown into a fire. It is only an enemy of God who wishes to see him return to the hell of unbelief after he has experienced the happiness of living in the heaven of faith. How could he tolerate

the emptiness of unbelief after he has enjoyed life in the active world of belief? The Qur'ān gradually builds up the believers' reaction against their enemies until it culminates in a true description of their dearest wish: "*they dearly wish to see you unbelievers.*" (Verse 2)

The second round makes only one comment about the strong bond of blood relations, a tie that is deeply rooted in people's hearts. It is a bond that often forces its presence in the form of warm friendliness:

> *Neither your kinsfolk nor your own children will be of any benefit to you. On the Day of Resurrection He will decide between you. God sees all that you do.* (Verse 3)

A believer works for the life to come, on which he focuses his hopes. Whatever he does in this life is merely the planting of the seeds. The harvest he awaits is in the life to come. This verse touches his heart with what happens there when all ties of blood are severed, and if the bond of faith is non-existent. This should make it easier for him to abandon such ties in the short life of this world, preferring the permanent bond that remains strong in both this life and the life to come. Hence, the *sūrah* says to the believers: "*Neither your kinsfolk nor your own children will be of any benefit to you.*" (Verse 3) These ties which you cherish, and the preservation of which forces you to befriend your's and God's enemies happened to Ḥāṭib in his eagerness to preserve his bond with his family, and as happened to others who left their relatives and children. All these ties will be of no benefit to you, because "*on the Day of Resurrection He will decide between you.*" (Verse 3) You will be separated from them, because the tie that binds people together is already severed. Belief is the only tie that counts in God's sight. "*God sees all that you do.*" (Verse 3) He is aware of the action itself and the intention behind it.

A Long Historical Relation

The third round establishes a clear link between all Muslims and the first generation of believers in God's oneness. They all join the same procession that moves across countless generations, distinguished by faith and shedding all ties except faith. They are all the same community,

starting with Abraham, who preached the first version of the pure faith. He provided an example to be followed, not only in faith but also in practice. He struggled with the bonds of kinship before he, and those with him, managed to purge their feelings of any bond other than that of faith:

> *You have a good example in Abraham and those who followed him, when they said to their people: 'We disown you and what you worship instead of God. We reject you. The enmity and hate that have arisen between us and you will last until you believe in God alone.' The only exception was Abraham, when he said to his father, 'I shall pray for forgiveness for you, although it is not in my power to be of any avail to you against God.' 'Our Lord! In You we have placed our trust, and to You do we turn, and with You is the final destination. Our Lord! Do not make of us a test for the unbelievers. Forgive us, Lord. You are the Almighty, the Wise.' In them, indeed, you have a good example for everyone who looks forward with hope to God and the Last Day. Anyone who turns away should remember that God is truly self-sufficient, worthy of all praise.* (Verses 4–6)

When a Muslim reflects on these verses, he discovers that he has a great, well-established ancestry, a long history, and an example to follow set long ago. He goes back to Abraham, not only in his faith but also in his personal experience. Thus, his experience goes beyond his own personal one and that of his generation. People in this great procession of the faithful have gone through a similar experience to what he is now facing, and they came to a certain conclusion, taking a firm decision. The question is far from new, and the requirement does not constitute a very heavy burden. Besides, should ties with relatives who are hostile to his faith be severed, he still belongs to a great community, cherishing the bond of faith with all its members. He is only a branch of a great tree with firm roots and many branches that spreads its shade wide. This tree was planted by Abraham, the first to surrender himself to God.

So, Abraham and his followers went through the same experience as the Muhājirīn, and they provide a good example: "*They said to their people: We disown you and what you worship instead of God. We reject you.*

The enmity and hate that have arisen between us and you will last until you believe in God alone." (Verse 4) Abraham and his followers made their stand clear: they dissociated themselves from their people, the deities they worshipped and their beliefs. They rejected them altogether and believed in God alone. The only feelings they had towards them were ones of enmity and hate until those people also came to believe in God alone. It was a total break that left no ties or bonds after the one of faith had been severed. This is the absolute verdict in such a situation. The example set by Abraham and his followers is good enough for every believer until the end of time.

Some Muslims, however, found a loophole enabling them to continue to maintain warm feelings towards idolatrous blood relatives. This loophole was Abraham insofar as he prayed to God to forgive his father who was an idolater. The Qur'ān explains Abraham's attitude when he promised his father that he would seek God's forgiveness for him: "*The only exception was Abraham, when he said to his father, 'I shall pray for forgiveness for you'.*" (Verse 4) Abraham said this before he was certain that his father still held stubbornly to his idolatrous beliefs. Abraham was hoping and expecting that his father would see the truth and accept the faith. In another *sūrah* we are told: "*Abraham prayed for the forgiveness of his father only because of a promise he had made to him. But when it became clear to him that he was God's enemy, he disowned him.*" (9: 114)

When Abraham assessed the situation properly, he placed the matter in God's hands, turning to Him for guidance, placing his trust completely in Him in all situations: "*Although it is not in my power to be of any avail to you against God. Our Lord! In You we have placed our trust, and to You do we turn, and with You is the final destination.*" (Verse 4) This total self-surrender to God is the essential feature of Abraham's faith placed under special focus so that his Muslim offspring properly appreciate it. Here again we see the Qur'ānic method of cultivating the Muslim community with directives based on stories and the lessons derived from them.

Therefore, the remainder of Abraham's supplication is also stated: "*Our Lord! Do not make of us a test for the unbelievers.*" (Verse 5) This prayer is an appeal to God not to give the unbelievers mastery over the believers, which would strengthen the former's rejection of true faith.

They would think that had faith provided any protection to its followers, they themselves would not have been able to subdue them. This is a confusing point, one that often surfaces when falsehood manages to gain the upper hand for a time and purpose known only to God. In such periods, tyranny is able to treat believers very badly. Good believers endure this test with patience, but this should not prevent them from praying to God to spare them such hardship that makes of them a test to others and a basis for creeping doubt.

Abraham and his group continue their supplication: "*Forgive us.*" This is said by Abraham, God's own friend, realizing that the standard of worship which is worthy of God is beyond his reach. As a human being, he cannot attain the level of worship which gives due thanks for God's favours and which sufficiently glorifies Him. Therefore, he appeals for forgiveness, setting an example for his own group and all later believers.

Concluding his prayer, Abraham addresses his Lord by His attributes that are the most suitable here: "*Lord! You are the Almighty, the Wise.*" (Verse 5)

Concluding its account of Abraham and his followers' attitude, of those who surrendered themselves to God, the *sūrah* repeats the fact that they provided a good example for all believers: "*In them, indeed, you have a good example for everyone who looks forward with hope to God and the Last Day. Anyone who turns away should remember that God is truly self-sufficient, worthy of all praise.*" (Verse 6) The example is there for those who look forward with hope to God and the Last Day. These are the ones who truly appreciate the experience that Abraham and his followers went through, and treat it as the example to follow. This, then, encourages the present generation of believers to strengthen their resolve. Anyone who abandons this way, leaving the noble procession of believers and disowns the bond with those great ancestors may do so. God needs no one: "*Anyone who turns away should remember that God is truly self-sufficient, worthy of all praise.*" (Verse 6)

In this round, the believers have been taken back to the early period of their long history, remembering their first origins on earth. They have learnt from the experience of those earlier generations and reviewed the conclusion to which such experience led. The way to follow is

not difficult, especially since they are not the first to tread it. The Qur'ān repeats this conclusion so as to make the procession of faith uninterrupted. No one who follows the same way should feel lonely, even if he finds himself the only one in his generation following that way! He will not find it difficult to discharge his duty because previous travellers discharged it before him.

Whom to Boycott

God knows how eager the early Muslims were to see the hostility and conflict with their own people come to an end. Therefore, the *sūrah* raises before them the hope that those enemies might yet join the Muslims and accept the Islamic faith. In this way, hostility between the two camps would be replaced by firmly-based affection. Again, the *sūrah* lightens their burden, stating the main rule on which international relations between the Muslim community and other powers are based. Thus, boycott and enmity are applied only in cases of aggression and hostility by unbelievers. When there is no aggression against Muslims and hostilities are absent, then Muslims should treat others kindly, as they deserve, always maintaining fairness and justice:

> *It may well be that God will bring about affection between you and those who are now your enemies. God is all powerful; God is much forgiving, ever merciful. God does not forbid you to deal kindly and with full equity with those who do not fight you on account of your faith, nor drive you out of your homes. God loves those who behave equitably. God only forbids you to turn in friendship towards those who fight against you because of your faith, and drive you from your homes, and help others to drive you out. Those of you who turn towards them in friendship are indeed wrongdoers.* (Verses 7–9)

Islam is a religion of peace, a faith based on love. It wants only for others to benefit from and implement its sound way of life. It wants all people to come together, under God's banner, as a fraternity based on love. Nothing prevents this other than aggression by Islam's enemies. Should those enemies wish to live in peace with Islam and Muslims,

Islam will not be the one to start enmity. Even if enmity and hostility exists, Islam preserves the seeds of friendship by extending justice and good treatment to its enemies, hoping that they will one day be convinced that their own advantage lies in adopting its noble beliefs. Islam never despairs of this possibility.

The first verse of this section refers to this hope that is never extinguished by despair. It seeks to lighten the burden of some of the Muhājirīn who were troubled by conflict with their own people: "*It may well be that God will bring about affection between you and those who are now your enemies.*" (Verse 7) As this prospect of hope is raised by God, it was certain to become a reality. When the Muslims heard it, they were certain that it would be fulfilled. Indeed, it was not long after, when Makkah fell to Islam, that the people of the Quraysh became Muslims, and all joined together under the same banner. All enmity between them disappeared and all were united as brethren.

"*God is all powerful.*" (Verse 7) He accomplishes what He wills, and no one can raise an objection, let alone try to stop Him. "*God is much forgiving, ever merciful.*" (Verse 7) He will forgive past sins and hostility.

Until God's promise is fulfilled, expressed here in the form of a hope, God gives them permission to be friendly with those who did not fight them or drive them out of their homes on account of their faith. No blame would attach to them if they maintained friendly relations with such people, treating them fairly, giving them all their due. On the other hand, there is a strict prohibition against friendship with those who fought them, drove them out of their land, or even helped in driving them out. Those who violate this prohibition are judged as wrongdoers. Wrongdoing is equated with unbelief, as God says in the Qur'ān: "*To associate partners with Him is indeed a great wrong.*" (31: 13) This is, then, a very serious warning that strikes awe in a believer's heart.

This rule about how to treat non-Muslims is most fair and fits with the nature of Islam and its outlook on human life and on the universe as a whole. It represents the basis of its international law, which considers the state of peace to be the permanent state with all peoples and groupings. This state of peace is revoked only when military aggression against Islam and its people takes place, for it is imperative that such aggression be

repelled; or when treason is feared after a treaty with others has been signed, for this represents a threat of aggression; or when freedom of belief and advocating Islam is forcibly suppressed, which again represents aggression. In all other cases, Islam extends the hand of peace, affection and justice to all people.

This rule fits perfectly with the overall Islamic concept, which makes the only bone of contention between them and their opponents that of faith. The only value a Muslim will not compromise, even if this forces him to fight, is faith. Nothing puts Muslims in conflict and hostility with other communities except the question of the freedom to present their faith to people, the freedom of belief, the freedom to implement the divine code in human life.

This directive fits with the drift of the *sūrah* which aims to give prominence to faith, making it the only banner Muslims raise. Whoever stands under it belongs to them, and whoever fights them on account of it is their enemy. Anyone who maintains peace with them, leaving them to their faith, preventing no one from listening to it and adopting it, and putting no pressure on those who believe in it is a person at peace. Islam allows kindly treatment to be extended to such people.

A Muslim lives for his faith, making it his sole purpose within himself and with all people. He does not enter into conflict for gain, nor does he fight for ties of race, land, tribe or family. His only struggle is to ensure that God's word reigns supreme, and that His faith is the code to be followed.

Sometime later *Sūrah* 9, Repentance, was revealed, starting with the verse that gave notice to communities that held peace treaties with the Muslim state. It gave a four-month notice of termination of any treaty that did not specify a term of expiry. Treaties that ran for a specified notice remained valid until the end of their terms. This measure was taken after practical experience showed that the idolaters in Arabia only observed their treaties with the Muslim community until they had a chance of victory should they violate such treaties. This brought into operation the other rule concerning such treaties: "*If you fear treachery from any folk, cast [your treaty with them] back to them in a fair manner. God does not love the treacherous.*" (8: 58) To give notice of termination in a fair way was necessary to secure the Islamic base, which at the time

included the whole of the Arabian Peninsula, against its enemies living alongside them. These were the idolaters and people of earlier religions who were repeatedly in breach of their treaties, trying to take the Muslim community unawares. This was essentially a permanent situation of aggression. Another reason for this measure was the fact that the two superpowers at the time, the Byzantine and Persian Empires, began to feel that Islam could become a source of danger to them and this they wanted to pre-empt. Therefore, they started to encourage Arab tribes living close to them to take a hostile attitude towards the Muslim state. All this necessitated that the Islamic base be made solid and secure from any internal enemy before any clash with outside powers could take place.

Women Migrants

The *sūrah* issues a ruling concerning women believers who might join the Muslim community:

> *Believers! When believing women come to you as migrants, test them. God knows best their faith. If you ascertain that they are believers, do not send them back to the unbelievers. They are no longer lawful [as wives] for the unbelievers, and these are no longer lawful to them. None the less, hand back to the unbelievers the dowries they have paid them. It is no offence for you to marry them after giving them their dowries. Do not hold on to marriage ties with unbelieving women. Ask for repayment of the dowries you have paid, just as they have the right to ask for repayment of their dowries. Such is God's judgement. He judges between you in equity. God is all-knowing, wise. Should any of your wives go over to the unbelievers and you subsequently acquire gains from them, then pay those whose wives have gone away the equivalent of whatever dowry they had paid. Fear God, in whom you believe.* (Verses 10–11)

The Prophet concluded the al-Ḥudaybiyah Treaty with the Quraysh in Makkah and this specified a condition whereby the Prophet and the Muslim community would return to them anyone who went over to the

Muslims, even though that person might be a Muslim. Reports mention that when the Prophet was about to leave al-Ḥudaybiyah, a few women came over to him seeking to join the Muslim community in Madīnah. The Quraysh asked for their extradition in accordance with the terms of the treaty. It appears that those terms were not conclusive in the case of women. These two verses were revealed to block returning women believers to the unbelievers, for fear that they would be persecuted on account of their faith.[1]

This was a situation requiring rules of international law. These rules outlined here regulate such cases on the basis of absolute fairness, without allowing the behaviour of the other party, unfair as it may be, to influence the Islamic stand. Furthermore, Islam's stance is that it ensures justice in all internal and external dealings.

The first step required by these rules was to test migrating women in order to determine their reasons for migration. In other words, they must not be trying to escape from a marriage that had gone wrong, or be pursuing some other material benefit, or hoping to marry men they were in love with in the Muslim community. Ibn 'Abbās reports that the Prophet tested any such woman, asking her: "By God, have you fled to us because you hate your husband? By God, have you come to us merely to migrate to a new land? By God, are you coming to us in pursuit of some material gain? By God, have you come to us only because you love God and His Messenger?"

'Ikrimah explains that the test was a form of questioning so as to establish whether the woman was migrating only because she loved God and His Messenger or for some other purpose. The test was also to establish whether or not she was in love with a man from the Muslim community, and whether or not she was fleeing from her husband.

1. It should be mentioned here that the Prophet and the Muslims abided by this treaty, right from the first moment after its signing. Hardly had the treaty been so signed when Suhayl ibn 'Amr, the Quraysh negotiator, saw his son coming to the Muslim camp seeking refuge. He was a Muslim but his father had imprisoned him and tried to force him to revert to idolatry. Suhayl demanded that his son be handed back to him, and the Prophet granted his request. He explained that Muslims are always true to their pledges. The events leading to the signing of this peace treaty are dealt with in detail in the commentary on *Sūrah* 48 in this volume. – Editor's note.

Such, then, was the test. It relied on statements made under oath. Whether such a woman had any different motive, God only knew. People simply cannot establish this with any measure of certainty: "*God knows best their faith.*" (Verse 10) When they have made their statements under oath, confirming that they are believers, then the Muslim community cannot "*send them back to the unbelievers. They are no longer lawful [as wives] for the unbelievers, and these are no longer lawful to them.*" (Verse 10) When the most important bond of faith has been severed, nothing can repair the relationship. Marriage is a union of permanent settlement and it cannot be properly established when the primary bond of faith is absent. Faith is the basic and vital emotion that keeps a heart alive; it cannot be replaced by any other. A believer's heart cannot warm to another that is devoid of faith. There can be no true feeling of mutual inclination or security between two hearts when only one of them has faith. Marriage survives on mutual affection, compassion, inclination and security.

After the Prophet's migration to Madīnah this issue had been left open, with no rule stated about it in the Qur'ān. Therefore, no couple were separated even if only one accepted Islam while the other did not. This was due to the fact that the Muslim society had not yet by then established firm roots. When al-Ḥudaybiyah Treaty was concluded, it was time that such a separation be made. Muslims, men and women, should understand that the bond that overrides all other bonds is faith, and they should put this rule into practice.

The provision for separating such couples was accompanied by a provision for compensation. Thus, an unbeliever whose wife left him because she was Muslim was entitled to receive back whatever he had paid to her in dowry at the time of their marriage. The same applied in reverse, should the man be a believer and his wife not.

When this had been done, the Muslims could marry such migrant women, provided that they paid them dowries. Scholars differ as to whether such women should observe a waiting period; as also over the length of the waiting period. Some scholars say that it is the same as that observed by a divorced woman, i.e. until she has gone through three menstrual periods, while others maintain that it lasts only until she has completed one period, to make sure that she is not pregnant. It

is agreed that if any such woman is pregnant, her waiting period lasts until she has given birth.

"*None the less, hand back to the unbelievers the dowries they have paid them. It is no offence for you to marry them after giving them their dowries. Do not hold on to marriage ties with unbelieving women. Ask for repayment of the dowries you have paid, just as they have the right to ask for repayment of their dowries.*" (Verse 10) All these rules are then tied to the strongest guarantee a believer has, which is that of watching God and fearing Him: "*Such is God's judgement. He judges between you in equity. God is all-knowing, wise.*" (Verse 10) Indeed, this is the only inviolable guarantee. God's judgement is that of the One who knows what is in people's hearts, the Almighty who has power over all creatures. It is enough that a Muslim should realize the source of this judgement in order to implement it fully, because he knows that he will ultimately return to God.

Should a believer lose what he had paid in dowry, because his unbeliever wife or her family refuses to refund her Muslim husband, as happened in some cases, the Muslim ruler would compensate him for this, taking this from any money due to the unbelievers whose Muslim wives had migrated to join the Muslim community, or from any war gains made by the Muslim community: "*Should any of your wives go over to the unbelievers and you subsequently acquire gains from them, then pay those whose wives have gone away the equivalent of whatever dowry they had paid.*" (Verse 11) Again this ruling is tied to the same guarantee that ensures the implementation of every Islamic rule: "*Fear God, in whom you believe.*" (Verse 11) This is a profound and touching instruction for believers.

We see how these rulings concerning the separation of married couples provide an example of the practical implementation of the Islamic concept of life values and ties. They reflect the unity of the Muslim community and its being distinct from any other. It is a community where all life is based on faith, where all distinctions of race, colour, language, family and land are insignificant. There is only one sign that distinguishes between people – the sign of the party to which they belong. There are only two parties: the party of God and the party of Satan.

Women's Pledge of Allegiance

The Prophet is then instructed on how women should pledge their allegiance, and what the terms of their pledge should be:

> *Prophet! When believing women come and pledge to you that they will not associate any partner with God, nor steal, nor commit adultery, nor kill their children, nor lie about who fathered their children, nor disobey you in anything reasonable, then accept their pledge of allegiance and pray to God to forgive them. God is most forgiving, ever merciful.* (Verse 12)

These terms outline the major elements of faith, and provide the framework of the new social system established by Islam. They comprise associating no partners with God in any way whatsoever. They confirm that offences with prescribed penalties, such as theft and adultery, should never be committed. Women should also pledge never to kill their children. This is a reference to the pre-Islamic practice of burying girls alive, and includes killing embryos for any reason. Women are placed in trust of their pregnancies. Another term of the pledge women give is that they should never "*lie about who fathered their children.*"[2] Ibn 'Abbās says: "This means that they must not attribute to their husbands any child that does not belong to them. The same view is stated by Muqātil. Perhaps this term, coming as it does after that of refraining from adultery altogether, was to address some practices of pre-Islamic days, when a woman might sleep with several men and when she gave birth to a child, she would choose its father from among them on the basis of looks, or perhaps on some other basis when she knew who its true father was. However, the text includes this and any other case of falsehood in this regard. Perhaps Ibn 'Abbās and Muqātil referred to this particular situation because of a case at the time.

The last term in women's pledge of allegiance is that they must not "*disobey you in anything reasonable.*" This means a commitment to obey

2. A more literal translation of this term of the pledge is "nor perpetrate any falsehood of their invention with regard to what is between their hands and legs." The chosen translation is based on the views of most leading scholars, as indicated in the commentary above. – Editor's note.

the Prophet in everything he says, because he never ordered anything other than what is reasonable and good. However, this term is also one of the main elements of the Islamic constitution. It makes clear that obedience of the Muslim ruler remains valid only within what is reasonable, i.e. what is in line with Islam and its laws. It does not give blanket cover, requiring obedience in every situation whatsoever. This rule ensures that the force of any legislation is derived from its being based on God's law, not the will of the ruler or the nation should they differ with God's law. Both ruler and nation are subject to God's law and derive their authority from it.

When women give such a comprehensive pledge of allegiance, their pledges are accepted. The Prophet is asked to pray to God to forgive them what they might have done in the past: "*Then accept their pledge of allegiance and pray to God to forgive them. God is most forgiving, ever merciful.*" (Verse 12) It is God who forgives and pardons.

The *sūrah* concludes with a general directive:

> *Believers! Do not take as friends any people with whom God is angry. They despair of the life to come just as the unbelievers despair of those buried in their graves.* (Verse 13)

This is addressed to believers in their capacity of faith, a faith that distinguishes them from all other communities. Some reports suggest that the description of '*people with whom God is angry*' refers to the Jews, since they have been branded as such elsewhere in the Qur'ān. However, we have here a general text that applies to the Jews, the polytheists and all other enemies of God. All these groups have incurred God's anger. All of them despair of the life to come. They never take it seriously, and never give it a thought. Their despair of it is the same as that of unbelievers who think that those who died will never return and be resurrected.

This final address sums up the theme of the *sūrah*, giving it a conclusion akin to its opening. Its message is thus very clearly stated.